

# Soviets Hold Protests for Democracy

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MOSCOW, Feb. 25—Radical political groups demanding a faster transition to democracy staged demonstrations today across the Soviet Union, drawing thousands of protesters who brushed aside official warnings of possible violence.

Between 50,000 and 100,000 people gathered in central Moscow to call on Communist authorities to begin an East European-style dialogue with independent social organizations and support progressive candidates in local elections. Smaller demonstrations took place in other Soviet cities, from the Ukrainian capital of Kiev in the west to Vladivostok in the east.

Organizers had expressed hopes that several hundred thousand more people would take part in the pro-democracy rallies and force the government to open round-table negotiations with the opposition.

The lower turnout for the demonstrations—the most ambitious coordinated protest since President Mikhail Gorbachev came to power in 1985—appeared to ease some of the political pressure that had been building on the Kremlin in the past few weeks. It also reflected differences between the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries, where largely peaceful revolutions forced hard-line Communist leaderships to give up power in the past year.

This was the radical opposition's first attempt to organize a nationwide pro-

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